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A

BRIEF STATEMENT

OF THE

NATURE AND CONSTITUTION

England. — Churches, &c. — Baptists

OF THE

Kent Association of

General-Baptist Churches.

PUBLISHED at the request of the Ministers and Friends
composing the Half-yearly-meeting, holden at Cranbrook,
Kent, March 6th. 1811.

Price Two-Pence.



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BRIEF STATEMENT

OF THE

NATURE AND CONSTITUTION

OF THE

General Hospital



PUBLISHED
under the authority of the
General Hospital, London
and March 1811.

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W. B. Smith, Printer, London.

A BRIEF

STATEMENT &c.

I. **A**S professed disciples of JESUS CHRIST, they acknowledge *him alone* as their Master, and consider themselves as *Brethren*. Matt. xxiii. 8.

II. As they acknowledge Christ to be their sole governor in religious concerns (Ephes. i. 22.) they do not feel themselves obliged to pay a regard to the decrees, edicts, or creeds of synods, councils or bodies of men, any farther, than they esteem them consistent with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which they receive as the true word of God, containing all things which are necessary for the faith and practice of Christians.

III. In conformity to the example and practice of the first Christians, and for their mutual edifica-

tion and comfort, they form themselves into Churches or Societies, which are, in their views, regulated and governed in the same manner as the original christian churches.

IV. Their Officers consist of **ELDERS**, or **PASTORS**, and **DEACONS**. The duty of the former is not only to preach the word and conduct the public worship of their assemblies, but also to administer the ordinances and superintend the government and discipline of the churches with which they are connected. The business of the Deacons is to assist the Pastor or Pastors, and to attend to the temporal concerns of the Society, as the relief of the Poor, &c. Titus i. 5. Acts vi. 3. In some Societies there are Ministers who assist the Pastor in the public religious services, but have not the particular care, or charge, of the church which is committed to the Elder.

V. The above officers are chosen by the free choice or suffrage of the Society for whose benefit their functions are to be exercised. They have also, another order of officers whom they style **MESSENGERS**; such probably were Timothy and

Titus. (Titus i. 5.) These officers are generally chosen from the Elders of the several Churches, and their business is to superintend the affairs of the several Churches in the connection, to visit them occasionally and give advice, or assistance to any particular Church, on application to them for the purpose.

VI. These officers, Messengers, Elders and Deacons, after being freely chosen by the society, are publicly set apart to their respective offices by laying on of hands and prayer, accompanied with a suitable address on the duties devolving upon them. The New Testament precedent of laying on of hands and prayer is likewise observed prior to receiving those who have been baptized to church communion and fellowship. But although they observe the primitive manner herein, they have no idea of communicating the gifts of the holy spirit; but as they regard the scriptural pattern and principle of the doctrine of Christ. Heb. vii. 2. They also esteem it a proper manner in which to seek the assistance and blessing of God on Persons appointed

to an office, or the introducing baptized persons to membership with their churches.

VII. When any person is desirous of joining any one of their societies and that desire is made known to any of the members, they direct him to apply to an Elder, Minister or Deacon of the Church, who upon application converses with him, in a friendly manner, on his ideas of Religion and his motives for wishing to submit to the ordinance of Baptism, &c. and for his further instruction (if necessary) informs him what is requisite to a due submission to that ordinance, and the advantages resulting from the discharge of this duty, and an union with the Church. For these purposes he refers him to the principles and practice of the Apostles and first Christians, and consequently points out to him as necessary qualifications, *Faith* and *Repentance*, and BAPTISM as a public profession of that Faith and Repentance, and of his desire to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. The above qualifications imply, they believe, that the subjects of Baptism must be such persons as have arrived at years of understanding, and not Infants, who are incapable of either Repentance, or Faith. They are also led to believe from the New Testament that Baptism consists in

Immersion. They stile themselves *General Baptists* in distinction from those Baptist Churches who profess to believe the Doctrines of *personal election, particular redemption, &c.*

VIII. When Persons make known their wish to join the society, they are inform'd that in consequence of such union they are to have a mutual regard and care for each other, as members of the spiritual body of Christ: 1. Cor. 25. xii. 26. of which they are briefly reminded by the Pastor when admitted into the Church. Consequently, when a member has the knowledge of any Brother acting improperly and inconsistently with the Christian profession, he is expected to converse with him in a friendly manner and to convince him, if possible, of his error: if the party admonished receives the admonition and manifests a proper temper of mind, the case is not referred to the Church; but if the desired effect is not produced, or the misdemeanor has been a flagrant violation of the rules of Christian morality, the Society is made acquainted with it, and he is set apart and suspended from the Lord's supper until there is reason to believe his repentance is sincere.

IX. Their members are expected regularly to attend the public services of the society to which they have joined themselves, as far as their situation and circumstances will permit; and if upon removal of their situation they are prevented attending at the place to which they belong, they are advised to attend some place of worship, if possible, of the same denomination, and occasionally partake of the Lord's supper with the brethren assembling there. It is however expected that all the members of each Church, occasionally make good their places and acknowledge their connection. But if in case of a change in their religious sentiments, or any other circumstance, they wish to dissolve the connection with the Church to which they belong, they have full liberty, there being no laws to enforce unity, but those of Christianity and Love. It is expected, however in this case, that they communicate their intention to the Church, assign the reasons for such proceeding and leave the connection in a respectful and friendly manner.

X. The expences which attend the erection and repairing of places of worship, and carrying on the public services of the Church, are defrayed by voluntary subscriptions or contributions. And every

member is expected to contribute, towards the above purposes, according to his ability. By the same means ministers are assisted as circumstances make it necessary.

XI. In order to keep up a connection among the Churches and to promote their mutual edification and benefit, they have occasional meetings, and an annual Association to which the several Churches in the County or district, send Deputies or Representatives, who together with their Pastors take into consideration the state of the Churches, and give them any counsel or advice, which they may think necessary.

XII. For cementing this general connection and for more extensive information and advice, they have an annual meeting in London on Whit Tuesday, **THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**, where Pastors, Ministers, and Representatives, meet to concert measures and give advice for the welfare of the general body.

They humbly offer this brief statement of the Constitution of their Churches to the notice of the Public in general, and particularly to the Members of the Societies, and the Youth who attend their Places of Public Worship; for they practice no Ceremonies nor maintain any Doctrines which they wish to be concealed; if they *are* in an error they wish to be convinced; until then, they think it their duty, zealously to support that cause which they believe will promote the honour of their God, the kingdom of their Blessed Redeemer and the spiritual and eternal interest of their fellow creatures. *Amen.*

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